



CMS Windows 2016 Migration in TEST

By Vrushali Nerpawar

Nearly 50 years of occupational safety and health data

In 2020, the Department of Labor (DOL) marks 50 years since President Richard Nixon signed into law the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970. This law was intended to ensure “so far as possible every working man and woman in the nation safe and healthful working conditions and to preserve our human resources.”¹ To accomplish this, the OSH Act authorized the Secretary of Labor to “develop and maintain an effective program of collection, compilation, and analysis of occupational safety and health statistics.”² The

Secretary delegated this responsibility to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which first published estimates from the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII) for the 1972 survey year.

This **Beyond the Numbers** article recognizes the 50th anniversary of the OSH Act of 1970 and discusses the SOII and the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) and changes in occupational safety and health data. These sister programs publish information on the counts, incidence rates, and characteristics of nonfatal work-related injuries and illnesses and fatal injuries, respectively.⁴ Established following passage of the 1970 OSH Act, the SOII has been the source of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses among U.S. workplaces since its inception. BLS established the CFOI in 1992 to provide more detailed data and characteristics of fatal workplace injuries and is widely regarded as the most comprehensive source available on workplace fatalities.

For nearly five decades, BLS has published national- and state-level estimates of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses from the SOII annually.⁵ These BLS data are integral to the DOL mission to improve working conditions by informing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and other policymakers about the incidence of nonfatal injuries and illnesses, occupational fatalities, and other related statistical data.⁶ OSHA and policymakers use these data to ensure safe and healthy working conditions of the American workforce.

Improving the national statistics

The incidence rate of nonfatal injuries and illnesses among private industry workplaces occurred at a rate of 10.9 cases per 100 full-time equivalent workers in 1972 and 2.8 cases in 2018. (See chart 1.)



Many changes have taken place in the realm of occupational injury and illness measurement since the enactment of the OSH Act of 1970. About 15 years following passage of the act, there was broad concern among Congress and the safety and health community that statistics on workplace injuries and illnesses were inadequate. As a result, BLS requested that the National Research Council convene a panel of experts to investigate these concerns and to recommend solutions for improving national statistics on workplace injuries and illnesses.⁷ This National Research Council panel published recommendations in 1987 that led BLS to restructure the SOII to capture detailed case circumstances and worker characteristics for injuries and illnesses that resulted in days away from work, first published for 1992.

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